

Pink salmon

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*

AKA: Humpback salmon

Native to: Northern Pacific

Habitat: Coastal waters and rivers

Pink salmon have a similar appearance to native Atlantic salmon (*salmo salar*), they occupy the same habitat and have the same anadromous (migratory) lifecycle.

Since the 1950s pink salmon have been repeatedly introduced to the Kola Peninsula in Northern Russia for commercial food production. Although stocking programmes ceased in the early 2000s, breeding populations had already been established and their subsequent spread has resulted in widespread dispersal. 2017 saw an increase of pink salmon reported across the North Atlantic, with 36 fish caught in 11 different rivers in Ireland from June to September.

While in sea water pink salmon have a steel-blue to blue-green colouration on their backs, with silver flanks and a white belly. They have distinctive large dark oval spots on their back and tail fin. The backs of spawning males become dark and red with brownish green blotches on their flanks. Males also develop a hump on their back, which is why they are often called "humpback" salmon.

Pink salmon directly competes with native Atlantic salmon in both river and marine phases of their lifecycle. They may also introduce parasites and pathogens which may affect native salmon.

As *O. gorbuscha* is not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland, under The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019, it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.

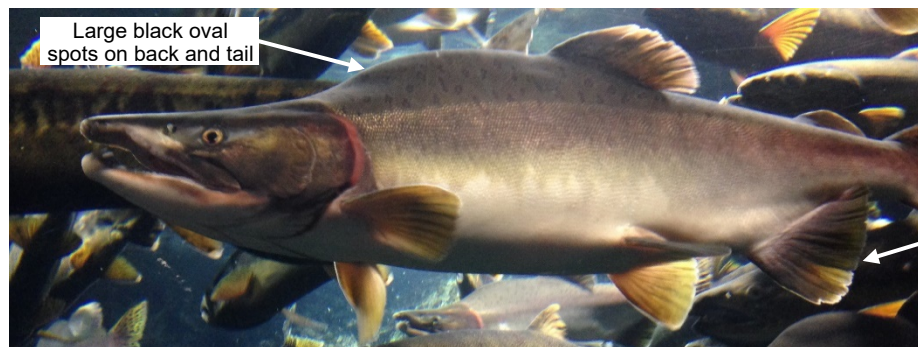


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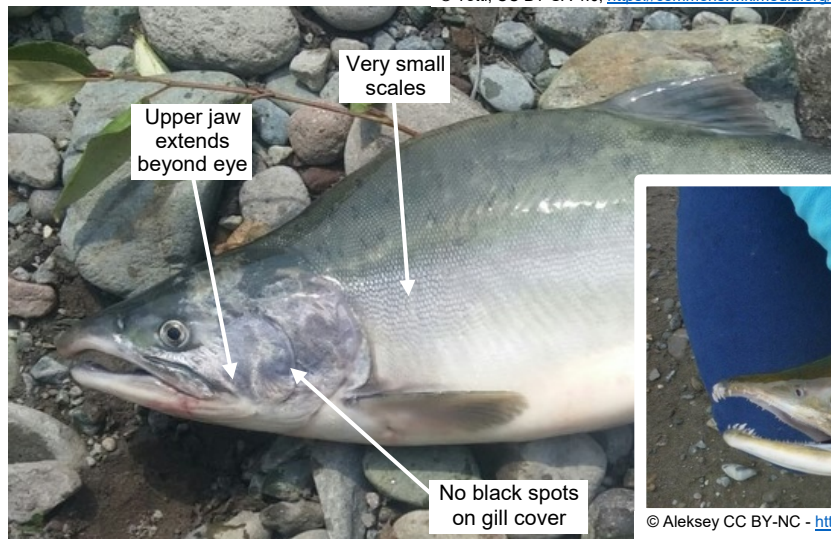
Drawing of pink salmon © Timothy Knepp,
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Key ID Features



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Can grow to 40 – 50cm in length



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Humped back
on males at
spawning time



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Spawning / river colouration –
dark back, red with brownish
green blotches on flanks

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

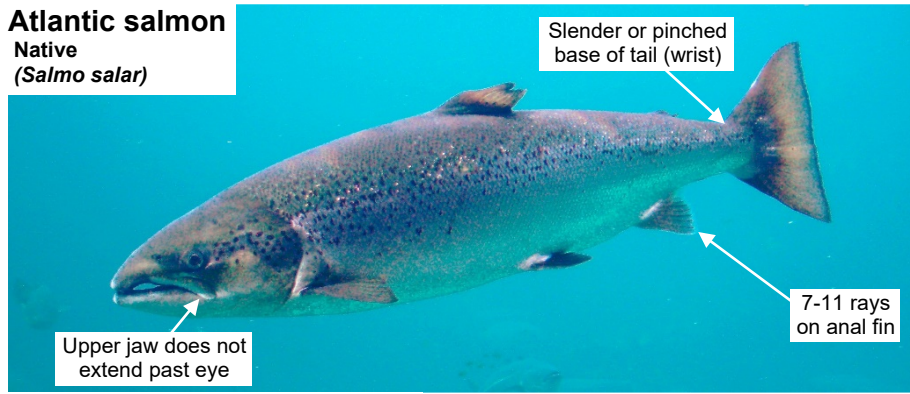
Pink salmon may spawn earlier in the year (June/July until early autumn) compared to Atlantic salmon or sea trout (November/December). During this period the colouration of pink salmon changes from a steel-blue to blue-green or silver to a dark and red back with brownish green blotches on their flanks. Near spawning males also form a distinctive humped back.

Field signs

In their native range pink salmon usually die after spawning, as a result decaying carcasses should be visible downriver of spawning beds. Although death after spawning is not uncommon, Atlantic salmon or sea trout generally survive.

Similar Species

Atlantic salmon Native (*Salmo salar*)



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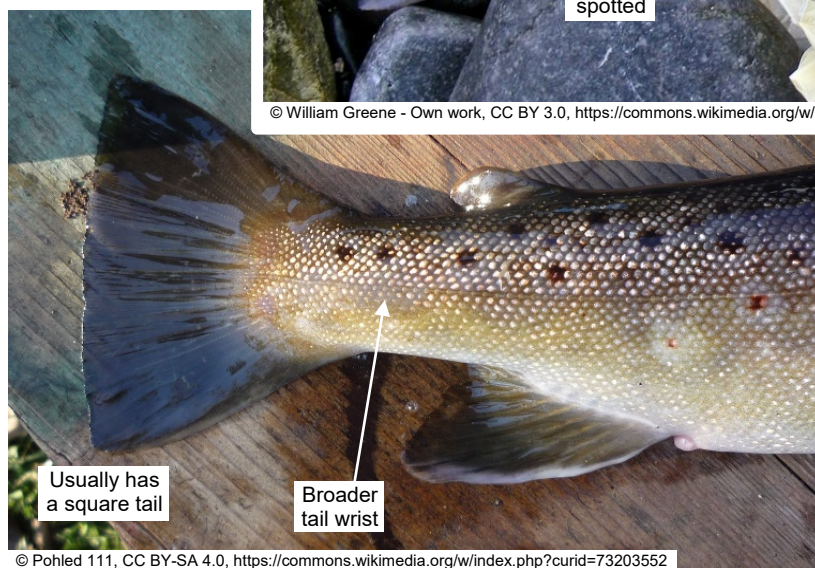


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Trout Native (*Salmo trutta*)



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References and further reading:

Nielsen, J., Rosing-Asvid A., Meire, L. & Nygaard, R. 2020. Widespread occurrence of pink salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*) throughout Greenland coastal waters. *Journal of Fish Biology*, [online] 96(6), pp.1505–1507.

Millane, M., Walsh, L., Roche, W.K. & Gargan, P.G. Unprecedented widespread occurrence of Pink Salmon *Oncorhynchus gorbuscha* in Ireland in 2017. *J Fish Biol.* 2019; 95: 651– 654.

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